Depot Town Rag

Volume 13, Number 9 *"All the news in one block in one month.*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

100% FREE Rag content

September 1990

Hometown poetry

Thanks for the Festival

City Dogs

Election slate

DTA Report Card

. . . and other strictly local stuff

Depot People: It's another sister act at the BBC

Step into the shop at 44 East Cross Street and you are welcomed through your senses: Soft music emanates from behind lovely visual displays, overhead fans gently move the delicately incensed air, plants, wallpaper and patinaed wood all seem framed by the pressed tin cornice leading to the ceiling. Even the back room of Bell, Book and Candle is soft, gentle and welcoming with its overstuffed sofa and lighted end table visible from the front door. Many customers ask if the two sisters live there, since it looks so elegant, homelike and comfortable.

Others ask if they're witches and, even though their name suggests it (they could pass for Kim Novak's sisters!) they expand their line beyond bells, books and candles to jewelry, New Age audio tapes, greeting cards, potpourri, dream catchers crystals and more. "We did have a cat named Piewacket when we opened two years ago," says co-owner, Christine Murphy, "but he ran away." So much for Hollywood movie hype.

Chris and her sister, Nan Stratos, experimented with different hours when they started their unique business in Depot Town and finally decided to keep daily 10 am - 6 pm hours. "We were here until 8 pm the first six months, but found that it didn't really matter when you were open, as long as you were very regular about it," Nan commented. As with most neighborhood small businesses, their hours are posted on the front door and they are regularly enthusiastic and helpful to their loyal clientele.

The 400 square foot show room is augmented by another 200 square feet of work room in the space that many regulars will remember as Mrs. Hall's apartment years ago. Still others might confuse the two with the "Two Sisters Sundry Store" which used to operate in what is now the east dining room of the Old Town Restaurant. But these sisters are decidely modern and up-to-date additions to this old district. "Ann Arbor people always comment on how much more warm and friendly they find the atmosphere here," said Chris, referring to both their shop and the entire neighborhood.

Still another amenity of the BBC is the workshops held in fall and winter at their shop. Experts hold forth on such topics as holistic healing, Bach flower remedies and astrology to eager learners spread out on cushions on the warmly waxed wood floors.

These two sisters truly carry on the tradition that "Depot Town *is* what America *was* !"

DDA unification plans nixed by State opinion

Milton Firestone, Michigan Assistant Attorney General, said, last month in a statement to Paul Fetters, that he sees "no reason not to agree with the Ypsilanti City Attorney," that declining property values must be proven in order to add to the already existing Depot Town Downtown Development Authority.

Fetters, the local DDA chairman, said he thinks this policy will also apply to any effort to put a Tax Increment Financing (TIFA) plan in place, as well.

The Authority gained approval last year to levy a 2 mil Ad Valorem tax upon properties all ready included in the District and has collected more than $3000 for its operation, but further funds from DDA statutes seem doubtful.

Lynda Hummel, at her first meeting on the DDA in July, is investigating the possibility of the Authority using those funds to seek grants for district improvements.

The annual DDA election of officers will take place at its 13 September meeting in the Freighthouse. It is open to the public.

Early publication:

As has been the tradition for these past twelve years, the September issue of *The Depot Town Rag* hits the streets on a Sunday in August, the last day of Heritage Festival — just to show the rest of the world that this kind of delightful neighborhood silliness goes on all year 'round. This issue will endeavor to offer a sampling of the taste of Depot Town for the remainder of 1990-91.

Meanwhile, look for *The Rag* on the first Saturday of every month — at all district businesses or by direct mail as a result of an annual $10 Associate Membership in the Depot Town Association. Subscription information is included on page four.

YPSI DIXIT

Depot Town's ultimate put-down for an arch-conservative politician in the historic railroad district -
- if one should ever surface:
"He had a one-track mind -
- and it was strictly narrow guage!"

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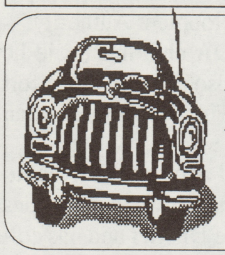

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Owed to Ypsilanti - Edgar Allen Poem

On August 10, 1985, *The Ypsilanti Press* published the following piece by a local poet in a section called *Poet's Corner.* Things didn't look too good in Ypsilanti, according to that writer. Since then we've been through drugs and prostitution, as well. Maybe another verse is imminent? Since this response comes five years later, we've withheld the poet's name. No one needs to be a prophet in his own town.

OUR TOWN

The streets of Ypsilanti grows more empty day by day,
As factories and businesses close their doors, and families move away.
I've seen this town in its heyday — it was quite a place to be,
every person on the streets was a friend to you and me.
The bomber plant was booming, Willow Village was going strong.
No one guessed that this would end and it would not be long.
But the auto plants took over as the bomber plant went down,
and everyone figured prosperity would always be around.
Folks had everything in Ypsi that a family would ever need,
I guess that's why big business started to take heed.
They built their malls and plazas that ran small businesses out.
Our theaters and our soda shops fell beside the way,
as fast-food stores and porno shops rose to have their day.
The people who lived in Ypsi when the town was young and clean,
know the losses that we feel and know just what we mean.
The people that think that progress is better for our town,
should read the book of Ypsilanti and start to look around.
My Grandfather helped to build this town, its parks and floral displays,
but these things have all disappeared, for these are different days.
The depot gardens are no more, Luna Lake is dry,
but our water tower landmark still reaches the sky.
The storefronts are all modern, the streets are wide and new,
but on weekends in Ypsilanti, what can the children do?

There *ain't* no 'dog days' down here!

Five years later, the poet's name does not appear in the local phone book. We hope he hasn't left town already. Maybe he has an unlisted phone number. We hope his period of depression has passed. Here's a delayed response to his 1985 piece. The bomber plant is still gone, but the Bomber Restaurant has returned. So has a lot of the other former spirit of Ypsilanti:

WHOSE TOWN?

In his poem, the poet thinks about the way things used to be.
He must not come outdoors much, or surely he would see
How Luna Lake is far from dry; it's fountain spraying daily:
The ice cream parlor, too, is packed with children squealing gaily.
The Depot gardens line the street in front of shops old-fashioned
With happy neighbors digging weeds, their civic mood impassioned.
His grandpa must have hit the streets more often.
This grandson might well do the same, his rhetoric to soften.
His moody lines drone sadly on, they're certainly not snappy!
We'll paraphrase this morbid verse and hope it makes him happy:
"The people who think progress has hurt our little town
Should write the book themselves, perhaps, to make the place reknown."
When critics sit at home all day to pen mean lines of verse
Their view is too distorted; their attitude gets worse.
The product is morose, for sure; the reading's far from witty.
They'd better leave their poems behind to brighten up our City.
His Grandpa didn't build this place by scoldings, you can bet.
He shared a view more positive, but his grandkid is all wet.
Our sidewalks teem with people who celebrate their living;
This community's a happy place and better for their giving.
A Festival of home-town pride this August weekend features
While the poet's view is filled with fear and creepy little creatures.
In future works on Ypsi's life, a writer would do well
To leave his desk and change his sights for a fresher view of Hell.

Dog Days? That's *every* day down in Depot Town!

Folks in the Journalism business characterize the slow end of summer as the 'dog days' in their newspapering business. Maybe that's when that old neighborhood mutt takes a nap in the middle of the road because there's no traffic — and no news worth reporting. And maybe that's when there's so little news that every *real* reporter is looking for a man-bites-dog-type story to relieve the tedium of August.

When Ypsilanti Heritage Festival planners picked the date for their first event twelve years ago, they intentionally plopped their celebration right into the middle of the 'dog days' season — just so there would be something to write about in the local dailies.

With this tradition in mind, we feature some of our neighborhood canines. After all, we've featured "Depot People" these last six months; why not "Depot Dogs," as well?

• *Trooper* Hansen, is the gold Cocker Spaniel who graces the front office of Standard Printing. As part of the fourth generation family business, Troop mostly is in charge of welcoming customers. If you're carrying part of a sandwich, you're even more welcome.

• *Stubby* McKeever, a porcine, black and white ocotogenarian, is often seen strolling the parking lots and shores of the Huron River with her family. Boge has a keen interest in jazz and is often found helping to prepare the stage, beer tent or tent for neighborhood events.

• *Megan* and *Chelsea* MacMillan are residents of the Masonic Block, walking with Superior Township's recreation director, Amy, for their daily regimen in the district. They're a miniature French Poodle and a Golden Mix of some kind. Chelsea is just visiting for the summer, but Megan has learned much in the area of decorum from her visiting friend.

• *Deja* Sorenson is most often found on her leash at Shear Genius, welcoming humans to get their haircuts, but offering no services to her own kind. Always elegantly coiffed, herself, she follows a long tradition of district dogs set by the late *Angie* Sorenson at that barbershop location.

*Kady*Anderson has been recuperating at Ike's Barbershop since her broken leg, and *Ragu* Kornilakis patrols the parking behind the Old Town Restaurant with playful canine charm.

Barbers, printers, shop keepers, jazz enthusiasts, and apartment dwellers -- Depot Town's certainly gone to the dogs.

It's our heritage: Pulling all together to make it a great Festival

"We owe many thanks to everyone who helped to make this year's Festival run so smoothly," agreed the officers of the Depot Town Association in the week before the Festival actually opened.

Although some experienced hands cynically characterized it as "the lull before the storm," pre-Festival meetings at the tables in front of Aubree's Saloon looked upon the plans and arrangements with great optimism and satisfaction.

Organizers of the Jazz Competition stated that many operations fell into place this year, with the unexpected surprise of a new deal for liquor liablility insurance. "It certainly got us off the ground and into a great start," said planner Bill French.

WEMU's Linda Yohn, in describing the line-up of jazz contestants, said, "It looks like the best program, yet."

Steve Gross, of Depot Exchange Antiques, circulated a bulletin to all businesses to coordinate sidewalk events for the district and sent thanks and good wishes to all who helped.

Connie Bank eagerly awaited the culmination of the Friday night Jitterbug contest among the street rods on exhibit -- a first for the annual Festival attractions.

All committee chairs sent thanks to the many volunteers who helped to make this the best Heritage Festival in twelve years of festivals.

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The Depot Town Association, Inc. August, 1990

It's report card time

How did DTA do this year?

In the November 1989 issue of *The Rag*, we reported "President Paul's Priorities"

1. To inlvolve (or re-involve) building owners, merchants, neighbors, -friendly or not - in the work of the Association.

- First time a merchant served as president
- Two local businesses supported the operation of the jazz promotions and bars
- Two neighboring businesses created a successful fashion show
- One newly active business person served as the nominating committee for the annual election.
- Three business owners are running for office
- Half the 50 volunteers for the April Blues Fest were new
- New residential tenants are introduced to volunteer ethic by owners
- New trees were planted in the street-side beds due to volunteer hustle and DTA finances
- Flower planting was color-coordinated for the first time
- Steve Gross conducted a variety of financially successful raffles for DTA
- DDA moved to unify the district
- Victorian Holiday fumbled along
- 20 local businesses sponsored the monthly Rag
- Engine Club conducted two neighborhood exhibits, participated in more elsewhere
- Frog Island Fest expanded to three days, focused on block promotions
- A promotions proposal was circulated among the neighbors, concluding that most would rather pay someone else to do the promoting

2. Develop a complete district, 2-mill Ad Valorem tax, and Tax Increment Financing.

- Ad Valorem Tax is in place
- District unification possibility is being guided by State officials (see page one)

3. See a solution to the dumpster problem.

- Farmers Market moved their dumpster to north end of building
- Follett House moved their dumpster to Frog Island parking lot
- Many dumpsters contain less recyclable material; boxes cut and sorted, bottles sorted

4. Support the Ypsilanti Recycling Center in any way we can.

- Published front page articles on Recycling expansion
- Landlords encouraged tenants to recycle more
- Set type for Center's brochures
- Locals serve on Recycling Board and as weekly volunteers

5. Work with the City to develop opportunities to rehabilitate the Freighthouse.

- Market manager, Gary Urick, took exception to Rag report of "project abandonment," reported to DTA about current and future plans for Freighthouse
- Engine Club continued to contribute to decoration of Coffeeshop
- City and Gary Urick continue close cooperation with neighborhood events

6. To explore ways of opening Ninde Street parking and improve parking on the south side of Cross Street.

- South side residents, owners, merchants cooperated to re-open the coal yard
- Owners of coal yard installed bollards at perimeter
- Sobbrys gravelled the access behind Old Town and Richie's buildings

7. Develop a Depot Town cookbook, calendar, sets of postcards and writing stationery.

- Cookbook created, published, sold.

8. To encourage the creative journalisitc fervor of the Depot Town Rag and encourage other numbers of advertising brochures.

- Rag continued into its thirteenth year of monthly publications.
- Featured a series of Olmsted plans for Ypsilanti, another series of Joe Thompson's memories of 1990, began a series called "Depot People"
- Six different people volunteered to help with collecting from sponsors
- Introduced video digitized photography
- Rag added to permanent collection of UM's Bentley Historical Collection and EMU's library
- Published Frog Island mailer and program at a profit to the Association
- Expanded the August 1990 publication to 12 pages and solicited sponsors outside the district to repeat profit motive of Frog Island program
- Proof reader, Vivian Rowland, and Feature writer, Wanda Spieser, added to staff

ELECTION NOTICE:

DTA annual election, **7:30 pm Thursday, 20 September 1990** in the Caboose.

Slate: Pres. - Bill French, Vice Pres - Paul Fetters, Treas. - Sally Richie, Sec.- Tom Dodd

Volunteers and nominees will also be accepted from the floor. Pay your annual dues and vote!

September 1990

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 9/13
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 9/20
The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday, 9/27
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Paul Fetters, president
c/o The Old Caboose
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The remembering game:
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"Dearie! Do you remember when we waltzed to the Souza band? My, wasn't the music grand? Dearie! Life was cheerie; in those good old days gone by. Do you remember? If you remember, then, dearie, you are much older than I!"

The biggest contest at Heritage Festival time is not to remember Ypsilanti's *ancient* history, but to remember what happened at which Heritage Festival over the past twelve years. Do you remember when all three of the Wallenda's little girls first went out on the wire? Remember the neighborhood dogs going nuts over the lions' roaring at night from the Circus on Frog Island? Remember when it rained on our parade? Do you remember the helicopters landing on the bridge and knocking over the arts & crafts booths with prop wash? Weren't those the good old days!

More recent observers may remember when one of the most popular restaurants in town used to sponsor non-profit program printings with their ad that asked the question, "Remember when? Remember when local businesses used to sponsor . . . " etc. They are still remembered and appreciated.

Another popular tabloid fills its inside-back page with a monthly column called "Remember When?" but nobody really remembers. We're lucky if we can find the same street address to go with those ancient photographs. Or the same street.

Cable TV interviews have recently produced a series with school retirees remembering the good old days in the Ann Arbor Public Schools. History doesn't have to be George Washington sleeping in your bed. It could even be the owner of the neighborhood hardware store sleeping in class in the third grade.

Nostalgia's not what it used to be. Andy Warhol was wrong. Everybody *already has* been famous; some time last week. It just depends on who's telling it and who's listening.

There's absolutely no one around any more who remembers the lumber mill which created Frog Island. And no one is in the block any longer who can remember the MCRR depot's original, pre-fire and -train wreck grandeur.

Who can remember the Dodge dealership at Miller Motors? Mostly, we're a generation of mid-rememberers who remember someone who *did* remember.

There are hundreds of great stories out there, just waiting to be told. If anyone remembers the charge of dynamite which convinced the motorcycle gang to leave the district, they're not telling. Some contemporaries have seen the cement blocks filling the former fireplace, but others have only seen the elegant bookcases built-in to cover the space. Where are the dynamiters and cyclists now? Don't they ever write memoirs?

Some have said that what this historic site needs is a good idiot savant — one who can remember the day and date of everything that ever happened — and who won't be concerned with the day-to-day operation of things. There's always somebody around who can tell you what year everything ever happened and we wonder why we didn't sit next to them in our American History classes. Where are they now, now that we're paying attention to our history?

The punked-out high schoolers had a tour of the Ypsilanti Historical Museum and three blue-haired retired schoolteachers showed them around from room to room, wisely commenting on only those topics originated by the Madonna wannabees. Their teacher was a bit on edge, having taught with most of the seniors earlier in his career. On the way back to school everything was set right in his mind when he overhead the kids agree, "Weren't those old ladies cool? That's what I want to be like when I'm their age."

A favorite Farmers' Market story: Two tots were squirming to stay on the same chair somewhere between the potbellied stove and the potbellied musicians one cold winter's Saturday morning. A nearby octogenarian pointed and whispered, "See those kids? Some day they'll be telling about the 'good old days' down in Depot Town. And they'll be right!"

Many of today's Depot Towners can say they remember when the store windows were boarded up. They remember when the Freighthouse didn't have a name or a purpose or any glass in the windows. They remember when 'volunteers' were the little trees growing though the broken sidewalks. And just about everybody in town can remember being told that's not a neighborhood for them to be seen in. But we didn't listen. We came down to all that bad history and made good history. Those weren't really the good old days, but they make today's stories so much more delicious.

We seem to need to compare. Before-and-after pictures fascinate us all, whether they be for historic preservation, aluminum siding, or instant weight loss. Someone had best be preserving today's Depot Town for those who will call *these* the good old days later on.

Who knows, dearie!? Maybe *we'll* be the subject of the 'before' versions in next year's Heritage Fest features! Then, dearie, you are much older than I!

Our heritage:
An involving situation

High property taxes got you down? Has the Savings and Loan scandal almost convinced you that you should, maybe, register to vote? Nothing any good on television this week? this month? this year? Are you among those former dippy, hippy, Yippie, YUPPIE dropouts looking for meaning in your life? Welcome to Depot Town.

You have found yourself in a never-never land something akin to Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*, only this one's real. You have not been transported back into some pre-mall time warp. This is real. And it's not a commercial for a carbonated beverage or America's Heartland automobiles, either.

Those people who smile at you as you pass on the sidewalks are not animated figures in a theme park; they are real, live human beings who are just there because they want to be. Nobody's paying them to be nice. That's just the way they are.

Those folks who talked to you from the next table in the restaurant aren't selling insurance. They just wanted to know if you really liked your sandwich because they've always seen it on the menu but had never tried it themselves. It wasn't a trick. Even if you didn't drive a pick-up truck into the neighborhood, you're still welcome.

Depot Town's ambiance wasn't made up in some corporate headquarters and pressed into plastic to be franchised all over the world.

But it could have been. There are plenty of other 'depot towns' out there. Almost every small town along a railroad track has a district that's been forgotten about since the folks started going to the shopping mall out on the Interstate.

(Why not sell our condo and move into the old Grange Hall and make pottery? Or bump out car fenders for the rest of our lives? And sit out on the sidewalk and have lunch and wave at the trains as they pass?)

If "finalize" is to make FINAL, then "realize" is to make REAL. And there are fewer places in today's society where you can get closer to REALITY than in Ypsilanti's Depot Town.

"Let's have a meeting down at the malt shop (ice cream parlor) (tavern) (caboose) and plan a big dance (fashion show) (concert) to raise funds for saving the old Town Hall (train station) (signal tower). My dad will let us use his barn and . . . "

Andy Hardy is alive and well and living in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town.

You can join Andy and his friends at The Old Caboose 'most any Thursday evening.

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